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ABSTRACT

The author undertakes a re-examination of the vocational counselor's traditional roles and considers some dramatic changes. The increasing societal emphasis on early childhood provokes questions about the current absence of such a focus in guidance training institutions. The paper stresses intervention at this primary level. New counselor roles such as institutional liaison and child advocate are considered. The burden is viewed as ultimately falling on counselor training institutions to divest themselves of their ossified interests in preparing counselors for traditional roles. The author concludes with the suggestion that competent human behavioral specialists be developed through a core program in which all contributing professions would share. (TL)

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SESSION I - NVGA ISSUE SESSION ON COUNSELOR PREPARATION FOR VOCATIONAL GUIDANCE

APGA CONVENTION

Atlantic City
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CAN WE RUN FAST ENOUGH TO CATCH UP?

by

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Last December 4,000 people gathered in Washington, D.C. for the White House Conference on Children. Despite the diversity of backgrounds and the presence of many militant groups fighting for visibility and support of their program, there was a surprising degree of agreement on areas of special need. If we in the NVGA wish to remain relevant to our society, it is imperative that we ask ourselves to reexamine our traditional roles and consider dramatic changes immediately.

Environment vs. Heredity

We have always accepted the theory that a person's self concept determines goals he will set for himself. It is clear that society is swinging strongly behind those forces which emphasize the impact of environment rather than heredity on the development of each person's potential. In Washington, members of Women's Liberation, the Black Caucus, the Chicano Caucus, the Indian Caucus, all angrily forced the delegates attention toward the ways in which society denies the contribution of their members. All castigated guidance personnel for their judgmental roles and their reinforcement of the status quo rather than serving as agents of change.

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Vocational Guidance - A Sorting or Developing Operation?

Most delegates saw the need for society to place top emphasis on the formative years of the child's existence. Infancy, Day Care, the role of the family, early identification of disabilities, planful introduction of a wide range of experiences for children to serve as a basis for later learning and as stimuli for physical maturation, all these and many more were emphasized.

Guidance personnel and counselor training institutions have given lip service to the importance of all of these, but have accepted a role which places them as the sorter and grader of people after society has already twisted them into shapes which keep the majority comfortable. Clearly if we are to become relevant we must become part of the preventative team, rather than the mop-up squad.

Are We Preparing Counselors for Work at the Early Childhood Level?

What impact does this all have on training guidance people to work in the early childhood area? Try the following test on yourself or if you prefer, on the relevance of the training program provided by your favorite institution.

How well are guidance people prepared to:

1) Discuss with pregnant girls the impact of their diet on the intelligence potential of their child.
2) Help mothers and fathers, despite background or economic status, offer their infant specific experiences vital to the growth and maturation of the child's sensory skills.
3) Understand what attitudes toward themselves or others of a different race children bring to nursery school.
4) Use the experience of the Israelis in their Kibbutz or of nurseries in the Soviet Union to reformulate our society's role in the beginning years.

5) Decide when school starts? If industries now are starting Day Care Centers, is the experience children will receive in those settings relevant to us? If so, how do our training programs reflect our concern? What role should guidance people play?

6) Deal with separation anxiety or school phobia?

7) Be involved in reexamining the impact of Sesame Street on children's acceptance of traditional kindergartens?

8) Help significant adults use a variety of media so they can select the one relevant to the task and the one which uses the child's existing repetoire of skills so we can insure success experiences? In a period when schools are moving toward individualized instruction, how much do you know of the alternative learning approaches possible?

9) Offer a differential diagnosis which suggests whether a child's low performance level reflects an impoverished range of experiences as opposed to the presence of organic damage?

10) Recognize the importance of peer groups and significant role models and begin to insure group experiences which can help others provide the child with the support he needs?

Vocational Guidance and Curriculum

Thus far this paper hasn't emphasized vocational guidance. It could have asked questions about the distorted view of work children now receive through textbooks, teachers, and parents. It could have provided examples of ways kindergarten teachers affect children's attitudes toward appropriate sex roles. Or the ways teachers could sharpen children's awareness of the transferability of skills as they help children photograph jobs with wheels, jobs in high places

(telephone lineman, fire-fighter, lumberjack, etc.), or in later grades help children see how geography affects jobs available in specific areas. These, however, are only examples. A real impact on curriculum will occur only when guidance personnel are trained to see their major responsibility as working with people in curriculum and instruction, to insure that vocational maturation concepts are introduced.

The emphasis in this paper has been at the primary level because that is where prevention of problems occur. To the degree the job is done well at the early levels, to that degree the role and function of guidance personnel at the secondary and adult levels will shift.

Is the Vocational Guidance Counselor the Answer Man?

There is great need in our society for sources of accurate information so people can make informed decisions. For many years guidance counselors have accepted responsibility for helping people learn about different jobs, training opportunities, admission standards, etc. As the range of information has grown and as the rate of change accelerates, counselors quickly find themselves providing inaccurate or obsolete information. The scope of the information sought is so great no one individual could hope to keep on top of it. It is time counselors accepted that fact and moved on to the more basic question. How can accurate information be obtained, stored, and retrieved? This quickly leads to the need for counselor skill in the use of computers and other forms of new technology. Ask yourself, are counselors still being trained in methods of classifying jobs or sources of occupational information which are time bound and therefore obsolete? The Occupational Outlook Handbook for exa ple contains data gathered at least two years prior to the date of publication.

Vocational Guidance, Community Control and Decentralization

As society questions the supposed economies that go with bigness and as they vent their anger at their feelings of helplessness in coping with institutions which tax them for wars or other expenditures they do not support, they express their feelings where they can. The local school remains dependent upon public support. It therefore offers one of the few avenues for people to change the institutions which control them. Parents from the far right to the far left recognize the critical role schools can play in developing in children values and attitudes which can either support or refute the varied value systems found in our society. With growing rapidity the grass roots of our society are demanding a significant role in the school. When parents demand and get a significant voice in who should be hired, how the budget is to be spent and how their children are to be taught, the group which does not open lines of communication to these pressure groups is voluntarily committing suicide. How well are guidance counselors prepared to work with community action groups? How many have been trained to cope with power politics and confrontation? How do they respond when told therapy is not desired, only "bread" and a guarantee that the basic needs listed by Maslow will be met first. Then, and only then, will they (the people) talk in terms of self actualization.

How prepared are counselors to respond to the suggestion of Paul Smith that counselors should be the child's advocate to help him cope with the institutions of society? Would they also be comfortable with his suggestion that counselors do <u>not</u> belong in the schools since if they are part of the establishment they cannot single-mindedly fight for the rights of the child? Put together his feeling that counselors should be hired by community parent groups and add to that the sizable budget cuts in Pupil Personnel Services, and then ask how clearly

counselors recognize their need for a base of support which may come from non-traditional sources?

Counselors and Diversified Staffing

As counselors seek to change from non-rewarding activities, they seek people to whom they can transfer these tasks. It is clear that community liaison personnel may greatly assist schools to communicate with parents and parents with school. But how are we preparing counselors to work with people whose life style may differ from theirs? As the counselors see traditional activities traded away, who is helping him explore new and more relevant roles? To the degree that counselors may find themselves with a staff reporting to them, where are counselors getting their training in the role of supervision. Who is helping them develop career ladders for supporting staff?

Counselor Training Institutions - Leading the Profession to a Bright Future or to Extinction?

The history of any profession is one of developing society's need for a service, training people to provide that service, and then developing standards to insure only competent people are licensed. The problem with this approach is that as a role becomes defined and institutionalized it also develops rigidity and ossification. Training institutions have a vested interest in proving that they are the source for leadership in an area they have cut out as their turf. All this is correct as long as society's needs don't shift rapidly or if no-one else questions your turf. Unfortunately for guidance counselors, both of these conditions of stability do not exist. Society wants help in new areas and is less concerned than in the past with some of our traditional roles (e.g. standardized testing). They are looking to the behavioral sciences for help. The group

who will respond will get the task.

These are the days of inter-disciplinary approaches. It's about time that we act consistently with our professed values and goals. We claim to believe in individual difference yet train counselors as if they were interchangeable parts. We tacitly recognize our joint heritage with social work and psychology but are too insecure to work toward a core training program which will increase communication between behavior scientists rather than promote diversity.

Where Do We Go From Here?

The magnitude of the task is so great and the changes so immense we may achieve our goals fastest if we create a new model rather than fight the inertia of existing professions.

It would be my suggestion that we develop human behavioral specialists through a core program in which all contributing professions would share. Specialization would be on functional rather than professional lines. We need specialists in working with groups, specialists in problems of learning, specialists in diagnosis, specialists in administration and supervision, and specialists in communication and storage and retrieval of information.

Despite my own commitment to the concept of pupil personnel services, I have avoided using that term for it no longer is broad enough. To help children we need to work with significant adults, with out of school agencies, and with the community. No minor addition of a few relevant courses will help our Counselor Training institutions. Their survival depends on a quantum leap so they do not merely catch up, but rush ahead, in order to provide society the help it needs immediately to cope with problems which if left unsolved can lead to catastrophe.